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Testimony Before the Public Health Committee

Public Hearing on Monday, March 16, 2009

Subject: H.B. 6676 - An Act Concerning Licensure of Clinical Social Workers

My name is Paula Crombie, I'm here to ask for your support for House Bill #6676, An Act Concerning the Licensure of Social Workers. I want to thank the chairs, Representative Elizabeth Ritter and Senator Jonathan Harris and members of the Public Health Committee for this opportunity to share my views on this bill.

I am here to represent the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). My testimony is drawn from my experience as the Director of Social Work at Yale-New Haven Hospital where I've been the Director since 1992. I've had previous years of experience as a social work administrator totaling over 25 years. Throughout my administrative career, I've seen the challenges faced as an employer recruiting new graduate MSW social workers. It is this experience that leads me to support this legislation.

As an employer needing to provide clinical social work services to patients, I've faced the difficulties of recruiting new MSW graduates. As an employer hiring a new graduate, we must make a significant investment to provide the necessary supervision and training required to the employee for a two (2) year period. This two year period is necessary in order for the new graduate to obtain the required 100 hours of supervision at one hour per week and the necessary 3,000 hours of clinical supervised work experience in order to sit for the licensure exam.

In addition to this burden on the employer, there looms the definite possibility that the new graduate may not pass the licensure exam therefore, can not retain the position. The impact on the employee is devastating since it results in the loss of their employment. As significant, is the cost to the employer of now being faced with the burden of staff turnover and recruiting a new employee.

I must admit, that I have faced this difficult situation. On several occasions, I've had the heart wrenching task of telling a very competent MSW social worker that she/he no longer can work as a clinical social worker in our setting because she/he has failed to pass the licensure exam. At Yale-New Haven Hospital, we allow the employee three tries to pass the licensure exam and it is with the third failure, that employment is terminated.

Since I do work in a hospital setting, it is required by the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation (JCAHO), that providers of clinical services be licensed or certified by their state regulator. Clinical social work services fall under this category and in Connecticut, the regulator is the CT Department of Health. Therefore, at Yale-New Haven Hospital and at many other hospitals offering clinical social work services, we provide our services in a supervised setting.

I happen to agree with the requirement that the provision of clinical services be by a trained, competent licensed or certified employee. In this time of consumer awareness and for the protection of our patients it is in the best interest of patient care that all clinical services are

provided by licensed, supervised employees. I view the requirement for licensed social workers as I do the requirement for licensed nursing staff or licensed physical therapists, or licensed pharmacists or licensed board certified physicians – this is the basis for the highest quality of care we can provide to our patients.

Hospitals and other health care and mental health providers are continually challenged to be as cost effective as possible therefore minimizing any potential disruption of services or added costs. Both the cost of supervision and the threat of staff turnover have resulted in many settings moving away from the hiring of new MSW graduates. Our challenge is to realize our investment in new graduates is worth the cost – that is the investment in time and commitment will result in a competent social worker able to provide the highest quality care to our patients.

I believe that this bill allowing for a new level of licensure as a Licensed Social Worker, is a positive response to the problem faced by new graduates and employers. A Licensed Social Worker, upon passage of an exam that is more relevant to their level of practice, will be allowed to work in a setting that does provide the necessary clinical supervision.

House Bill #6676 responds to both the needs of the new MSW graduates for employment and employers needing to higher licensed skilled social workers. The new graduates can obtain employment based on their training as a social worker and the employer will have the ability to hire qualified licensed social workers without the fear of losing them due to a failure to pass the exam after a two-year investment.

As I close, I want to thank the members of the Public Health Committee for this opportunity to share my views on this critical piece of legislation.